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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT761, LEBANON: SAAD HARIRI NOT YET DECIDED ON PRIME

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT761	2008-05-24 17:25	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11352>
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000761

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO-A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK

USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2018

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAAD HARIRI NOT YET DECIDED ON PRIME
MINISTER, DISILLUSIONED WITH INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

REF: A. BEIRUT 759

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 758

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A somber and defeatist-sounding March 14 leader Saad Hariri did not appear to have decided whether he would become prime minister in the next cabinet. Citing the election of a president as the only victory emerging from Doha, he complained about the lack of response from the international community in the wake of Hizballah's takeover of much of downtown Beirut. He again pressed for accelerated military and financial assistance, stressing the need for items like Cobra attack helicopters to enable the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to stand up to Hizballah. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) CDA Sison, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief, met with majority leader Saad Hariri at his office in Qoreitem on May 24, less than 24 hours before Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander General Michel Sleiman was scheduled to be elected president. Hariri advisors Ghattas Khoury and Nader Hariri and notetaker Nadine Chehab also attended the meeting.

[1](#)3. (C) The Charge opened the meeting stressing that the majority was facing a marathon rather than a sprint, although both the immediate tactical decisions and longer term strategic decisions were key to winning the 2009 parliamentary elections. As Khoury and Nader Hariri had stated before Saad entered the room, Saad's Future Movement and March 14 had some tough challenges ahead, as they seek to solidify political support, recover from the humiliation suffered heaped upon the Sunnis by Hizballah, and form a cabinet capable of responding to the people's needs. Saad acknowledged that the majority was in a marathon race.

[1](#)4. (C) The Charge also relayed her discussion with Sleiman the evening before (Ref B), in which she had stressed the need to implement the Doha agreement in its entirety, including addressing the issue of the relationship between the state and Hizballah. Although the U.S. would not enter into the name game, she had stressed to Sleiman the need to keep the LAF in good hands to ensure that the current ambitious U.S.-LAF program of training and equipment remained on track.

DOHA: WE DID WHAT WAS
NECESSARY TO SAVE LEBANON

[1](#)5. (C) Saad was in his deepest defeatist mode, fiddling incessantly with his prayer beads and repeatedly expressing his disillusionment with the international community. "When we were under fire, everyone was in a coma," he said; "We had to do what we did to save Lebanon." The Sunnis were "heartbroken," Saad continued (Khoury used the word "raped"), and he refused to give them any more "false expectations."

[1](#)6. (C) Note: Before Saad joined the meeting, Khoury called the Doha agreement "decent" and the best possible under the circumstances. He agreed with the Charge that March 14 had secured a success in ensuring that the word "resistance" did not make it into the final text. Khoury further noted that Saad was "adamant" that what Hizballah did in Beirut would not pass lightly, and that Saad had conveyed this to General Sleiman. End note.

¶17. (C) The only victory from Doha was that Lebanon would finally elect a president, Saad continued. But Sleiman now has a big problem: whereas he once was "well-liked" by all the Lebanese, now, after his recent inaction facing Hizballah, he was now "well-hated." (Comment: A plethora of Lebanese flags and posters of Sleiman have sprung up throughout Beirut over the past few days as part of a coordinated LAF PR campaign. End comment.)

KEEPING MUM ON WHO
WILL BE PRIME MINISTER

BEIRUT 00000761 002 OF 002

¶18. (C) Saad did not appear to have decided on who would be the next prime minister, merely stating that it was "up to me." (Note: Before Saad entered, Nader told us the Saudis would respect whichever decision Saad makes. However, we have heard from several contacts that the Saudis told Saad current PM Fouad Siniora should remain as prime minister. End note.) "We'll do what we have to do to keep the country stable," Saad added, agreeing with the Charge that the next 10 months would be critical in the lead-up to the spring 2009 parliamentary elections.

¶19. (C) Before Saad joined the meeting, Nader acknowledged that Doha was only "round one" and that the majority had a long way to go. Khoury added that the majority needed to do what was best for the Lebanese people over the next 10 months, addressing social issues to which PM Siniora had not been sensitive, citing Economic Minister Sami Haddad attempt to raise the price of bread as a key example. Siniora is stubborn, Khoury said, and difficult to work with. Khoury expected that, as had happened with late PM Rafiq Hariri, ultimately the cabinet would be comprised of a "clear slate" of leaders not involved in the current wrangling over cabinet seats.

SEND COBRAS NOW!

¶10. (C) Saad complained about remarks made by the USG about Hizballah losing support, saying, "This doesn't help us." What we need is accelerated military and Paris III assistance, he said, rather than mere words. The Charge noted that the U.S. already had committed over \$300 million in U.S. military training and equipment assistance to the LAF and was looking at ways to further support the LAF. Saad dismissed this, countering that Iran and Syria are providing much more than \$300 million to Hizballah. He noted that he would see Iranian FM Mottaki during his visit for Sleiman's swearing in, but would "avoid" Syrian FM Moallem.

¶11. (C) "We need Cobra attack helicopters!" he said, if we are to face down Hizballah. "The U.S. has no sense of urgency," he complained, while we are living here in the middle of a storm." The Charge noted this week's delivery of U.S. ammunition to the LAF, as well as the body armor shipment received earlier in the month.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Saad appeared genuinely torn as to what to do about the prime ministership. Even his advisors, before Saad entered the room, seemed in the dark, telling the Charge, "You tell us" who will be prime minister. Although defeatist in attitude, he also appeared resolved to attack the political challenges leading up to the 2009 parliamentary elections and fully cognizant of the uphill battles ahead.
SISON